POLICY & PRACTICE

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Society Backs Stem Cell Research

The Endocrine Society responded to a judge's temporary ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research by reiterating its call for more and broader funding for stem cell studies. Last month U.S. District Court Judge Royce Lamberth ruled that President Obama's 2009 expansion of federal funding violated a 1996 law making the destruction of human embryos illegal. Nevertheless, the Endocrine Society reissued its 2009 position statement backing increased National Institutes of Health funding for such research. The position paper also calls for more embryonic stem cell lines to be available for NIH-funded research and for funding of studies that use cells generated by somatic cell nuclear transfer and those harvested from embryos discarded after in vitro fertilization procedures.

Diabetes Hospitalization Costs High

U.S. hospitals spent $83 billion caring for people with diabetes in 2008, about 23% of the total for all conditions, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Nearly one in every five hospitalizations that year involved a patient with diabetes, the AHRQ said. The expenses included costs associated with more than 540,000 hospital stays specifically for diabetes and roughly 7.2 million stays for diabetic patients being treated for other conditions such as heart disease, kidney damage, infection, and foot or leg amputation. On average, the AHRQ found, hospital stays for people with diabetes cost 25% more than did stays for people without the disease. Medicare paid 60% of the total bill for patients with diabetes, while private insurance paid 23% and Medicaid picked up 10% of the tab.

Diabetes, Environment Linked

Clean home environments and maternal obesity may be conducive to type 1 diabetes, researchers reported in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. Scientists based in Washington State and Israel compared nearly 1,900 children hospitalized with type 1 diabetes with more than 7,400 matched controls for factors involving maternal and child weights, family size, socioeconomic status, and prenatal care. They found that type 1 diabetes was less likely in children with older siblings and those with indicators of lower socioeconomic status. The researchers said that both associations lend credence to the hygiene hypothesis, which suggests that a cleaner living environment affects the developing immune system and causes increased susceptibility to autoimmune diseases.

Diabetes Education Helps

A study using data from private insurance and Medicare claims shows that people who receive diabetes education lasting more than a year have fewer inpatient hospital admissions and show higher compliance with medication regimens than do patients receiving less information about their disease. Commissioned by the American Association of Diabetes Educators and conducted by a consulting company, the study looked at 3 years of claims data. "Drug costs are higher and hospital admission costs are lower" for patients who receive the extended diabetes education, Karen Fitzner, Ph.D., chief science and practice officer for the association, said in an interview. Dr. Fitzner said that patients who have had more than a year of such training adhere to their treatment plans 2%-8% better than do those who haven't had any education.

Endocrinologist Satisfaction High

Endocrinologists remain highly satisfied with their career choice, with 76% saying they would choose the same career again and 73% saying they would recommend the field to a medical student, according to a survey by Epocrates, maker of mobile and Web-based information products. In the survey of 166 endocrinologists, nearly 70% said they spend more than 15 minutes with each patient. Responding to questions on a range of topics, they expressed some dislike for the new health care reform legislation, with 62% giving it a C or D and 20% giving it a failing grade. Almost 20% of the doctors said the new law would cause them to retire later, while 15% said it would result in their retiring earlier.

—Jane Anderson